



# Women's Mental Health Info Session

Friday, December 17, 2021

RHJ VAMC

Welcome!

Katie Rider Munday, Ph.D.,  
Women's Mental Health Champion

Contact info: 912-408-  
2903/2914/2916

# Current Women-Only Groups

## Women's Empowerment Group

- Wednesdays 830-945
- A different topic is addressed weekly with a focus on developing healthy behaviors and a balanced view of intimacy, as well as increased empowerment

## Women's Stress Management Group

- Thursdays 1300-1400
- Skills-building and discussion-based class focused on improving stress management techniques and connecting with other women on common issues and coping strategies

## Women-Only Group Options

### Women's Health and Healing After Trauma

- Thursdays 1300-1400
- Group for female survivors of sexual trauma designed to enhance trauma recovery skills with an emphasis on overall health and wellbeing

### Women's Chronic Pain Management Group

- Wednesdays 1030-1130
- A Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Chronic Pain (CBT-CP) group for Women Veterans with a special emphasis on chronic pain issues and management strategies specific to women

# Women-Only Group Options

- Women's MST Group
  - Mondays 1300-1400
  - Open-ended support group with a focus on specific topics related to MST (e.g., managing relationships, sleep, anger; coping with distress; unhelpful thinking traps, etc.)
  - Currently available to SC residents only

## Group Referrals

---

You must be a current RHJ patient  
to attend these groups

---

Please contact your current  
primary care and/or mental health  
provider to request referral



**American  
Red Cross**

- Women's MST Group
  - Virtual resiliency workshop and 1 art class
  - Tuesday evenings at 630
  - Schedule:
    - March 1: Creating Calmness
    - March 8: Effective Communication
    - March 15: Stress/Anger & Art
  - To join, contact Ms. Karen Cook at [karen.cook3@redcross.org](mailto:karen.cook3@redcross.org)

# Eligibility

- If you are not a current VA patient and desire to pursue care, please contact:
  - <https://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply/>
  - <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage>
  - Call toll free: 1-877-222-8387



# MyHealtheVet

- <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/home>

Search |


Pharmacy ▾Get Care ▾Track Health ▾Research Health ▾MHV Community ▾

Care

Sign in


ation:

19 vaccine and Delta variant updates, and to find out how to get your vaccine (and booster shots) at VA, go to  
make sure you can [find your vaccine record](#).




### Appointments

Keep track of your upcoming VA medical appointments and get email



### Messages

Communicate securely online with your VA health care team and other



### Health

View, print, or do your VA medical r

# Women Veteran Call Center



[Women Veterans Health Care Home \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/women-veterans-health-care-home/)



### ACT Coach



Practice lessons learned during acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) in your daily life.

iOS Android



### AIMS for Anger Manag...



Better track, address, and manage your anger with AIMS.

iOS Android



### Airborne Hazards and ...



Access information and resources for deployment-related exposures.

Web



### Annie App for Veterans



Receive text reminders to help you manage your care.

Web



### CHAMPVA Pay



Look up the participation status of CHAMPVA medical codes.

Web Android

# VA Mobile Apps

[VA App Store](#) | [VA Mobile](#)

# Thank You!

- Katie Rider Munday, Ph.D.,  
RHJ Women's Mental Health  
Champion
- 912-408-2903/2914/2916



# Charleston Vet Center

Presenter:

Brenda Richardson, VOPS

*(Veteran Outreach Program Specialist)*

To serve veterans and their families or significant others by providing a continuum of quality care that adds values for veterans, families and communities.



# Background

- Congress established Vet Centers in 1979 because a significant number of Vietnam combat and era Veterans were not accessing VA services at the same levels as Korean and World War II Veterans. Over the past 40 years, Veterans have used Vet Centers as a place for assistance as well as camaraderie.
- Vet Centers started began as a veteran peer counseling organization comprised of combat veterans helping veterans with readjustment challenges.
- Today, 300 Vet Centers employ Licensed Social Workers (LISW/LCSW), Licensed Professional Counselors, Licensed Family and Marriage Therapists (LMFT), and Psychologists (many who are combat veterans themselves or spouses) to work with readjustment issues that active duty, veterans, their families and significant others face after returning from a war zone or conflict.

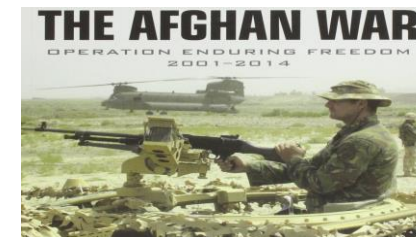
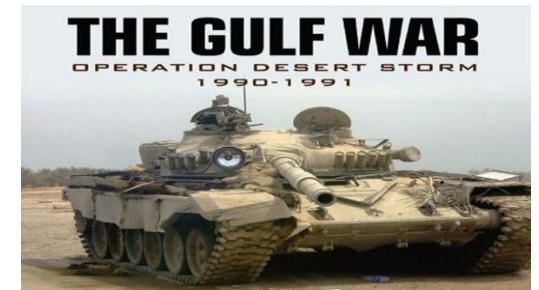
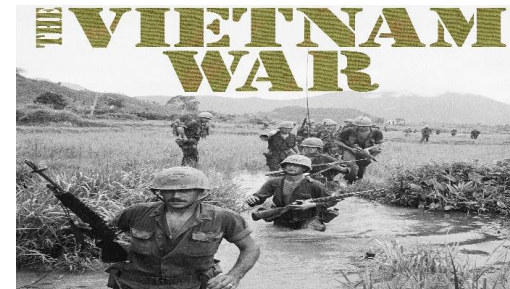


# Eligibility

- If you are a Veteran or service member, including members of the National Guard and Reserve, you can access our services if you:
  - ■ Served on active military duty in any combat theater or area of hostility.
  - ■ Experienced military sexual trauma (regardless of gender or service era.)
  - ■ Provided mortuary services or direct emergent medical care to treat the casualties of war while serving on active military duty. ■ Served stateside during a national disaster as a member of the National Guard or Reserve.
  - ■ Participated in a drug interdiction operation as a member of the U.S. Coast Guard (regardless of location.) ■ Performed as a member of an unmanned aerial vehicle crew that provided direct support to operations in a combat theater or area of hostility.
  - ■ Accessed care at a Vet Center prior to January 2, 2013, as a Vietnam-Era Veteran. We encourage you to contact us, even if you are unsure if you meet these criteria. If we can't help you, we will find someone who will.
- Our services are also available to family members and loved ones when their participation would support the growth and goals of the Veteran or active-duty service member.

# Eligibility cont'd...

- **World War II:** 7 Dec 1941 to 31 Dec 1946
- **Korean War:** 27 Jun 1950 to 31 Jun 1955
- **Vietnam War:** 28 Feb 1961 to 7 May 1975
- **Lebanon:** 25 Aug 1982 to 26 Feb 1984
- **Grenada:** 23 Oct 1983 to 21 Nov 1983
- **Panama:** 20 Dec 1989 to 31 Jan 1990
- **Persian Gulf:** 2 Aug 1990 to –
- **Bosnia:** 21 Nov 1995 to 1 Nov 2007
- **Kosovo:** 24 mar 1999 to --
- **Somalia:** 17 Sept 1992 to –
- **OPERATION Joint Endeavor /Guard /Forge:** 24 Mar 1999 to--
- **Global War on Terrorism:** 11 Sep 2001 to—
- **Operation Enduring Freedom:** 7 Oct 2001 to--
- **Operation Iraqi Freedom:** 19 Mar 2003 to 17 Feb 2010
- **Operation New Dawn:** 17 Feb 2010 to--





# Services at Charleston Vet Center

- Individual therapy
- Group (Readjustment, Women's Empowerment, Significant Others)
  - Guitars4Vets, Red Cross Art Therapy, PGA Hope,
  - Music Group
- Marriage and Family counseling
- Military Sexual Trauma and/or Harassment
- Bereavement
- Outreach activities and events
- Substance Abuse Information and Referral
- Limited Face-to-Face (COVID-19)
- Telehealth is available
- **Vet Center Call Center 24/7 1-877-927-8387**

# ***Military Women Drive-Thru Celebration***

## ***Charleston Vet Center***



***Left to Right: La'Conya Manuel - Readjustment Therapist, Dr. Nicole Sciarrino-- VAMC MST Coordinator, Tia Jordan Seals - VCD, Joseph Queen--Palmetto Warrior Connection, Sharon Frazier - Readjustment Therapist, Rick Mitchell - PSA, Brenda Richardson - VOPS, & Dorothy Gouedy--VAMC Women Veteran Program Manger***





## Mobile Vet Center

- Fleet of 80 Vehicles
- Provides outreach and services to Veterans and families geographically distant from existing VA services.
- Provides early access to Vet Center services to Veterans newly returning from war via outreach to demobilization active military bases, National Guard, and Reserve locations nationally.
- Each Mobile Vet Center is equipped with a state-of-the-art satellite communications package that includes fully encrypted teleconferencing equipment, access to all
- VA systems and connectivity to emergency response systems

# Location



3625 West Montague Avenue  
North Charleston, SC 29418  
(843) 789-7000





# WOMEN VETERANS HEALTHCARE

Amanda B. McFann, FNPC  
Women's Health Medical Director

# WOMEN ARE A SPECIAL POPULATION-

“A WOMAN IS LIKE A TEA BAG — YOU NEVER HOW STRONG SHE IS UNTIL SHE GETS IN HOT WATER” — ELEANOR ROOSEVELT



- ❖ Primary, Specialty, & gender-specific
- ❖ Mental Health
- ❖ Emergency
- ❖ Inpatient
- ❖ Maternity/limited newborn
- ❖ Some fertility
- ❖ LGBTQ+



## Who we are and Whom we serve:

We currently care for 10,025 Women Veterans in Charleston and surrounding Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs).

WH Services are in the following locations:

North Charleston,

Goose Creek,

Myrtle Beach,

Savannah,

Beaufort,

Hinesville and

GYN Services at the Main Facility and North Charleston

Each facility has a WH Liaison to assist our female veterans with our multifaceted and unique health care services available.

Erica Murray, LPN - NCC

Jodi Creel, LPN -GYN

Philisa Legrier, RN - HNV

Kelli Franco, RN - SAV

Dawn Gauthier, LPN - GCR

Elizabeth Holmes, RN - RHJ

Laura Mahaffey, RN - Beaufort  
Karen Wierzbicki, LPN - MYB

Katharyn Watts, RN - Inpatient - 4BS

Dorothy Gouedy RN, Women Veteran Program Manager

Amanda McFann, FNP, Women Veteran Program Director

Women's Mental Health Champion- Katie RiderMunday, PhD,

Staff Psychologist MST Coordinator: Nicole Sciarrino, Psy D

Maternity Care Coordinator- Rhonda Lucas, RN

LGBTQ Coordinators- Kathie Hermayer, MD and Kristy Watters, Psy D

Relationship Health and Safety-Amanda Purewal, SW

Minority Coordinator- Lutricia Overton,

MPH Director Charleston Vet Center- Tia A. Jordan Seals, LISW-CP

Community Care Women's Health-Carroll Venning, RN

Community Care In Vitro Fertilization and reproductive endo- Shannon Shuler, RN

# OUTREACH & PROJECTS...

- ❖ Whole Health
- ❖ Forums
- ❖ Maternity/IVF/Lactation
- ❖ Baby Showers
- ❖ Specialty – Wigs and Bras!
- ❖ Inpatient beds, PJs, SOAP!





QUESTIONS???





# Military Sexual Trauma

---

Nicole A. Sciarrino, PsyD

PTSD Clinical Team/MST Coordinator

Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center

Nicole.Sciarrino@va.gov

843-789-6735





# What is MST?

---

- Military Sexual Trauma (MST) is:
  - Sexual assault
  - Threatening sexual harassment that occurred during a person's military service
- Both males and females are affected by MST
  - About 1 in 3 women Veterans have told their VA provider that they have experienced MST



# Who is most likely to experience MST?

---

- Younger age
- Enlisted rank
  - Lower enlisted rank
- Negative home life
- Previous assault history

# Disclosing MST to VA Providers

---

- Many women Veterans who have experienced MST often do not feel comfortable disclosing this information to their VA provider.
- Disclosure is important – VA is here for you!
  - *Treatment for MST-related difficulties is **FREE**.*
  - *Some Veterans may be eligible for MST-related care even if they are deemed ineligible for other types of VA care!*
  - *You can receive MST-related care regardless of whether you have an MST disability rating*



WE BELIEVE  
YOU AND  
**WE BELIEVE  
IN YOU**

# WOMEN

You are not alone in overcoming military sexual trauma

Military Sexual Trauma (MST) is sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurred during a Veteran's military service:

- Being threatened or pressured into sexual activities, such as with threats or promises of better assignments
- Sexual contact without your consent, such as when asleep or intoxicated
- Being physically forced to have sex
- Being touched in a way that made you uncomfortable
- Repeated comments about your body or sexual activities
- Threatening and unwanted sexual advances



One in four women Veterans says she experienced MST when asked by a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provider.

Women Veterans of

**ALL BACKGROUNDS**

have experienced MST, independent of factors such as era of service, age, race, rank, or sexual orientation.

There may have been times in life when you were treated badly because you are a woman. Experiencing MST may have felt like one more sign you didn't matter. Because of that, you also may worry that you won't be believed if you speak up. **WE BELIEVE YOU.**

## CONCERNS COMMONLY REPORTED BY WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED MST



MST IS **NEVER** YOUR FAULT

## THERE ARE MANY PATHS TO HEALING FROM MST. VA CAN HELP.



- VA has free MST-related services for Veterans
- No documentation of the MST experience is needed to get care
- You may be able to receive MST-related services even if you are not eligible for other VA care
- Every VA has an MST Coordinator to help you access services and resources
- Contact your local VA health care facility and ask to speak to the MST Coordinator for more information

Both women and men can experience MST. Visit [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp) to learn more about the MST-related recovery programs and services for women and men at VA.

# Common Difficulties Following MST

Greater severity of mental health symptoms

PTSD

Depression

Anxiety

Alcohol & drug abuse

Suicidal thoughts

Physical symptoms, chronic health conditions, and impaired health status

Pelvic pain & sexual dysfunction

Menstrual problems

Headaches

GI symptoms

Chronic fatigue





# Treatment Options

---

- Although there is no specific MST clinic/program at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, providers across the hospital are trained in helping Veterans work through the MST event(s).
  - MST-related care is also available through your local Vet Center (North Charleston, Savannah, Myrtle Beach)
- **No specific treatment for MST**
- Individual therapy for depression, anxiety, PTSD, eating disorders, etc.
- Psychotherapies that include coping skills
- Couples or family therapy
- Group therapy
  - **MST-specific options available!**

## MST-Specific Group Offerings at Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center

### Women's MST Group Tuesdays @ 13:00

**About:** This group reviews specific topics related to MST and recovery from trauma (e.g., managing relationships, sleep, anger; coping with distress; unhelpful thinking traps) and provides opportunities for group members to discuss current stressors, provide support and encouragement to one another, and share aspects of their journey/ recovery. Specific details of sexual trauma are not discussed.

**Who is eligible?** Any woman Veteran residing in South Carolina.

### Women's Empowerment Group Wednesdays @ 08:30

**About:** This group contains 11 sessions. During each meeting, the group will address a new topic that will assist in supporting healthy behaviors, a balanced view of intimacy and sexuality, and focus on self-empowerment. Completion of practice assignments between sessions is an essential part of this group. In this group we will not discuss specific details of any individuals' experience of sexual trauma, rather we will discuss common reactions to sexual assault, with a focus on the negative impacts on intimacy and sexuality.

**Who is eligible?** Veterans interested in this group must have completed/ be enrolled in some form of structured individual therapy, have a mental health provider (do not have to be seeing them weekly), and have a diagnosis of PTSD or trauma/stressor related disorder.

### Women's Health & Healing After Trauma Thursdays @ 13:00

**About:** This 15-week group is for female survivors of MST and is designed to enhance trauma recovery skills with an emphasis on overall health and wellbeing. Topics will include managing emotions, physical health, relationship and intimacy issues, boundary setting, and body image.

**Who is eligible?** Veterans interested in this group must have a mental health provider (do not have to be seeing them weekly).

### Women Veteran's Resiliency and Art Therapy Workshop

**Every other Tuesday @ 18:30**

**About:** The American Red Cross, in partnership with the RHJVAMC, is pleased to offer a 6-week virtual workshop series for female Veterans who have experienced MST to help address stress management and self-care while juggling all the complexities of life during these unprecedented times. Each workshop session will include a live, facilitated discussion and provide participants with multiple opportunities to share with other Veterans, learn and practice new skills and resiliency techniques (e.g., stress management, effective communication, relating to children), ask questions and express unlimited creative potential.

**Who is eligible?** Women Veterans who have experienced MST and have a diagnosis of PTSD.

### Men's Resiliency and Art Therapy Workshop Every other Tuesday @ 18:30.

**About:** The American Red Cross, in partnership with the RHJVAMC, is pleased to offer a 6-week virtual workshop series for female Veterans who have experienced MST to help address stress management and self-care while juggling all the complexities of life during these unprecedented times. Each workshop session will include a live, facilitated discussion and provide participants with multiple opportunities to share with other Veterans, learn and practice new skills and resiliency techniques (e.g., stress management, effective communication, relating to children), ask questions and express unlimited creative potential.

**Who is eligible?** Male Veterans who have experienced MST and have a diagnosis of PTSD.



WE BELIEVE  
YOU AND  
WE BELIEVE  
IN YOU

## MST-Specific Group Offerings at the Vet Centers

In addition to services at RHJVAMC, Veterans with a history of MST are eligible for individual, group, and family therapy at their local Vet Centers (i.e., North Charleston, Myrtle Beach, and Savannah). In order to begin attending a group at the Vet Center, they must call and schedule an initial intake and complete several pre-treatment sessions to aid in identifying most appropriate group options, discuss group rules, etc.

Below are a list of current MST group options for both men and women, depending upon the site. Not all sites have group options for both men and women Veterans; however, some sites (e.g., Myrtle Beach) are offering groups virtually and for the time being will accept referrals for anywhere in the RHJVAMC catchment area (e.g., SAV, HNV)!

**North Charleston:**  
3625 W Montague Ave  
North Charleston, SC 29418  
Ph: (843) 789-7000

### Women's Empowerment ("Navigating through trauma") Group - Thursdays @ 16:30

**About:** A weekly support Group for female Veterans designed to facilitate healing through self-expression and self-empowerment in a non-judgmental and non-threatening atmosphere.

**How to refer:** Please contact Sharon V. Frazier, LMSW, ACMSW, Readjustment Counselor, at 843-789-7000. Note: This group is not specific for Veterans who have experienced MST; however, eligibility criteria include: combat exposure or MST.

**Savannah:**  
321 Commercial Dr., Savannah, GA 31406  
Ph: (912) 961-5800

### Women's MST Group

**About:** This open group addresses the common reactions that many women experience following an MST event. The group enhances coping skills, provides MST-specific resources, and addresses different topics each week (e.g., emotion regulation, interpersonal functioning, mental health difficulties). Because the group is open, and ever-changing, women can continue to participate for as long as is required.

**How to refer:** Please call the Savannah Vet Center and express interest in joining the Women's MST group!

# MST- Specific Group Offerings





# Where can I find additional resources?

---

- <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mentalhealth/msthome/index.asp>

# Have you experienced MST?

---



**Talk to any of your VA providers OR**



**Call Nicole Sciarrino, PsyD**

843-789-6735

# SUICIDE PREVENTION OVERVIEW: WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH OUTREACH EVENT

---

RALPH H. JOHNSON VA MEDICAL CENTER

12/17/21

12PM

JEN WRAY, PHD

SECTION CHIEF- SUICIDE PREVENTION

# A LITTLE HOUSEKEEPING BEFORE WE START:

---

- Suicide is an intense topic for some people.
  - If you need to take a break, or step out, please do so.
  - Immediate Resources:
    - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
      - Service members and Veterans should press 1 to connect with the Veterans Crisis Line.

# DATA: SUICIDE IN THE U.S.

---

- **National public health problem (as defined by CDC)**
  - 45,861 Americans died by suicide in 2018, including 6,261 Veterans.
- **Service member and Veteran issue**
  - The suicide rate for Veterans is 1.5 times the rate for non-Veteran adults
- **Veteran populations at risk**
  - Younger Veterans, Women Veterans, Veterans in a period of transition, Veterans with exposure to suicide, Veterans with access to lethal means



# WHAT IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT A FELLOW SERVICE MEMBER?

---

**S**

Signs of suicidal thinking should be recognized (e.g., hopelessness, anxiety/agitation/not sleeping/mood swings/anger, feeling there is no reason to live, engaging in risky activities, change in alcohol/substance use, withdrawing from others, looking for ways to harm self, talking about suicide)

**A**

Ask the most important question of all (“Are you thinking about killing yourself”)

**V**

Validate the Veteran’s experience (recognize the situation is serious, do not pass judgment, reassure that help is available)

**E**

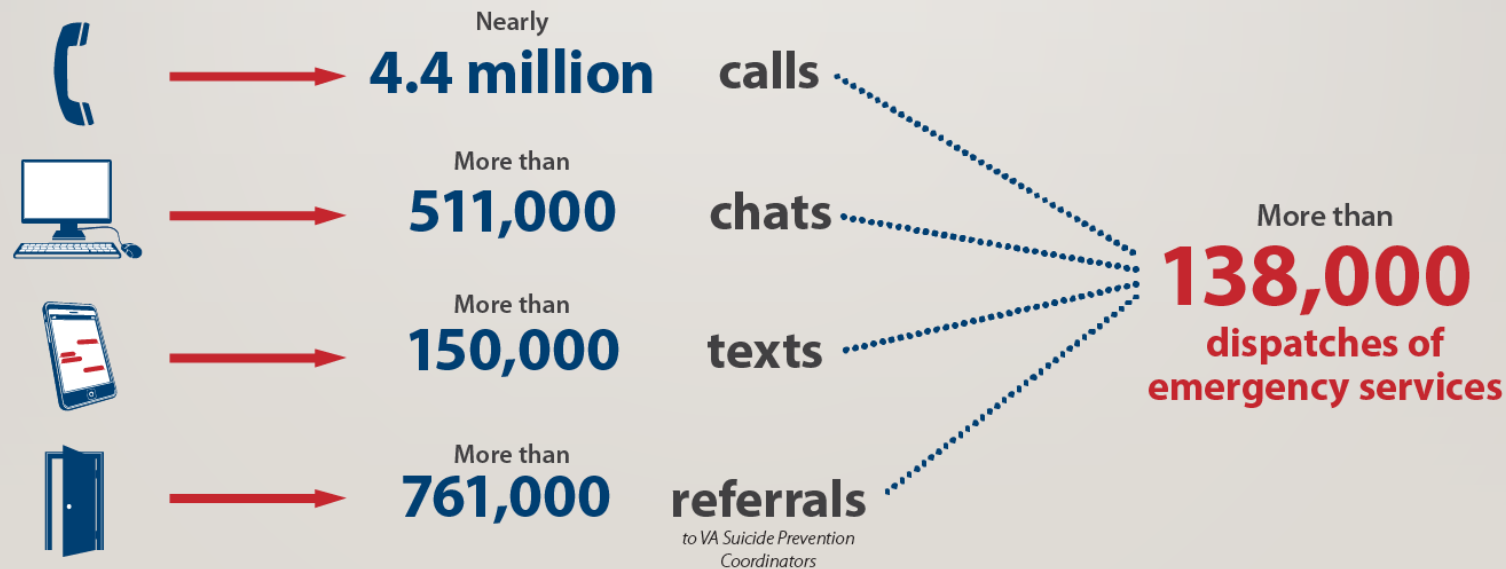
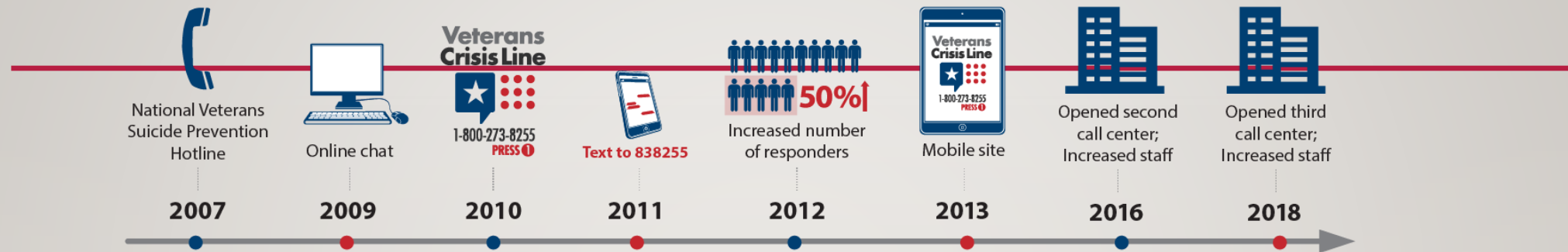
Encourage treatment and Expedite getting help (Stay with the Veteran, call VCL, escort to local Emergency Room)

# WHAT IF YOU FEEL YOU NEED SOME ASSISTANCE?

---

- Talk with your primary care team
- Talk with your established Mental Health provider
- Call the TAP line : 843-789-6400
- Call, text, or chat the VCL: 1-800-273-8255
- Present to your local Emergency Department

# VETERANS AND MILITARY CRISIS LINE- FREE, CONFIDENTIAL SUPPORT 24/7/365





# RESOURCES

---

- VCL (save in phone)
  - 1-800-273-8255, press 1 if a Vet/family member
  - Text: 838255
  - <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat>
- Make the Connection: <https://maketheconnection.net/conditions/suicide>
- SAVE training: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49Vg-xM9L7Q>
- Gun locks
  - Video link: <https://www.facebook.com/VAMCCharleston/videos/443322386556747>
- TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors): <https://www.taps.org/>
- Find a Local VA SPC: [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator)
- CHSVA Suicide Prevention contact: 843-577-5011 X7844

# Healthy Relationships

**Mandi Purewal, LISW-CP**

Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program (IPVAP) Coordinator

843-789-7635



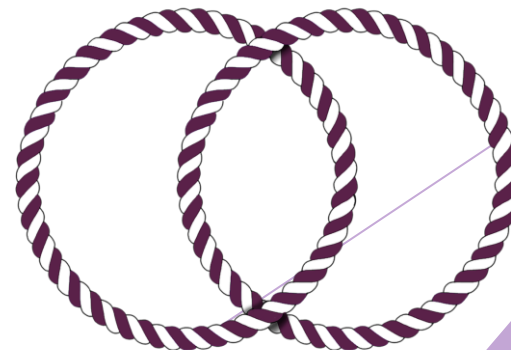
# What is an Intimate Partner?

- ▶ Law and Legal definition :
  - ▶ “the term “intimate partner” means, with respect to a person, the spouse of the person, a former spouse of the person, an individual who is a parent of a child of the person, and an individual who cohabitates or has cohabited with the person.” [18 USCS 921).
  - ▶ A significant other
  - ▶ A previous significant other



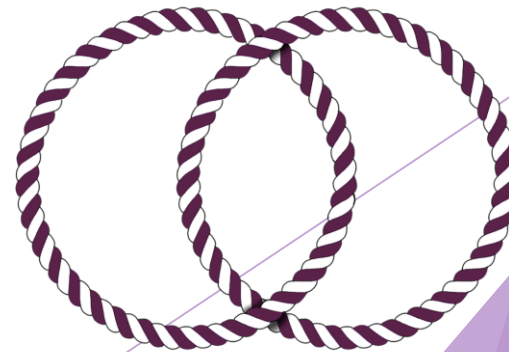
# Signs of a Healthy Relationship

- ▶ Having trust or building trust
- ▶ Communication with honesty and respect
- ▶ Patience
- ▶ Empathy (willing to take on another person's perspective)
- ▶ Affection and interest
- ▶ Flexibility and compromise
- ▶ Respect and Reciprocity
- ▶ Individuality and Personal Boundaries



# Signs of an Unhealthy Relationship

- ▶ Lack of Communication
- ▶ Dishonesty, Distrust, Disrespect
- ▶ Dependence
- ▶ Jealousy
- ▶ Manipulation
- ▶ Criticism, insults
- ▶ Isolation
- ▶ Constant fighting, Resentment
- ▶ Controlling behaviors
- ▶ Unable to maintain individuality

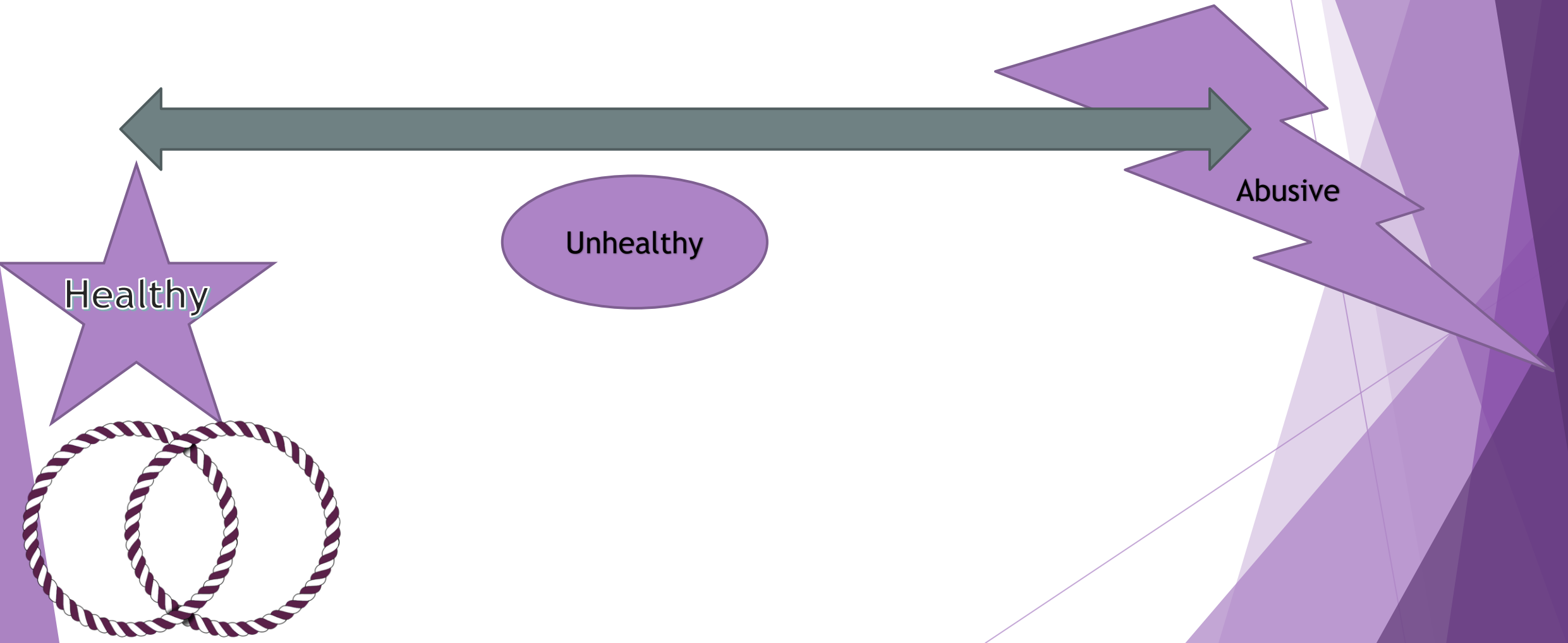


# Consequences to Unhealthy Relationships

- ▶ Having chronic stress
- ▶ Poor immune system
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Abuse



# Relationship Spectrum



# Types of Abuse

Physical

Emotional

Sexual

Stalking

Financial





# Safety considerations

- ▶ Make a safety plan if you are going to stay or leave
- ▶ Have your phone to call 911 if you need to
- ▶ Is there a place you can go that is safe?
- ▶ Who are your safe supportive people?
- ▶ Do you need to contact a shelter?
- ▶ Consider downloading the app “myPlan App” FREE



# Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program

- Identify resources for users and experiencers of IPV.
- Train VA providers on identifying and treating IPV.
- Increase Awareness of IPV and the impact



# Helpful resources

## ► Problems in Relationships?

- [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)
- Dialectical Behavioral Therapy Skills Groups
- Couples Counseling - request a consult through a VA provider

## ► Living in an abusive Relationship?

- myPlan app
- National Domestic Violence Hotline  
800-799-7233
- My Sister's House (Tri County)  
800-273-4673
- IPVAP Coordinator: Mandi Purewal  
843-789-7635



# Honor Relationship Wellness

## VA Supports Healing & Growth



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration

Contact Your VA Coordinator  
**Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program**  
[www.socialwork.va.gov/IPV/Coordinators.asp](http://www.socialwork.va.gov/IPV/Coordinators.asp)

The National Domestic Violence  
**HOTLINE**  
1.800.799.SAFE (7233) • 1.800.787.3224 (TTY)





# LGBTQ+ Veteran 101

Kristy Watters, PsyD  
LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Co-Coordinator  
LGBTQ+ SEP Manager

# RHJ VAMC Resources

---

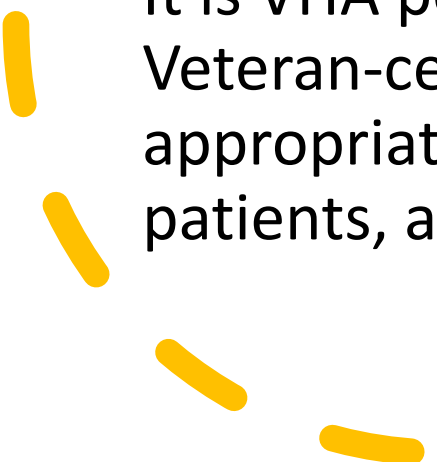
- Kristy Watters, PsyD, Clinical Psychologist

## My role is as follows:

- Create a welcoming environment for LGBTQ+ Veterans.
- Provide education and clinical consultation for RHJ providers regarding VHA LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Policies and Directives.
- Support the development and expansion of LGBTQ+ Veteran care services at RHJ.
- Provide resources and information to assist LGBTQ+ Veterans receiving optimal care at RHJ.
- Build LGBTQ+ Community Partnerships and conduct community-based outreach.



# VA's commitment to Serving ALL Who Served

- The Department of Veteran Affairs is dedicated to serving all eligible service members, Veterans and their families. It also recognizes the existing diversity within this population, including the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (LGB) community.
  - **VHA DIRECTIVE 1340(2)**
  - It is VHA policy that all staff provides clinically appropriate, comprehensive, Veteran-centered care with respect and dignity to LGB Veterans. Clinically appropriate care includes assessment of sexual health as indicated with all patients, and attention to health disparities experienced by LGB people.
- 

# VA's commitment to Serving ALL Who Served

- The Department of Veteran Affairs is dedicated to serving all eligible service members, Veterans and their families. It also recognizes the existing diversity within this population, including the Transgender and Intersex Veterans.
- **VHA DIRECTIVE 1341(2)**
- It is VHA policy that staff provide clinically appropriate, comprehensive, Veteran centered care with **respect** and **dignity** to enrolled or otherwise eligible transgender and intersex Veterans, including but not limited to hormonal therapy, mental health care, preoperative evaluation, and medically necessary post-operative and long-term care following gender confirming/affirming surgery. **It is VHA policy that Veterans must be addressed based upon their self-identified gender identity; the use of Veteran's preferred name and pronoun is required.**



# “Coming Out” vs “Inviting In”

- “Coming out” has been the common term for someone who acknowledges being LGBTQ+. It can give the impression that people who don’t identify as cisgender or heterosexual are hiding something from society, rather than acknowledging how homophobia, biphobia and transphobia create an unwelcoming environment. When publicly identifying as LGBTQ+, someone is inviting people into a part of their life, which should be protected and celebrated.
- I invite you to think about the perspective of “inviting in,” and how you will apply this into your clinical practice. Any barriers? Limitations?

# RHJ VAMC Therapy Resources

LGBT support group via  
VVC through MYB

Dr. Kimberly Cuddy, PsyD,  
contact for referral

“PRIDE In All Who Served:  
A Health Education Group  
for LGBT Veterans”  
Actively taking referrals –  
10-week psychoeducation

Dr. Kimberly Cuddy, PsyD,  
contact for referral

**LGBT Veterans are  
referred to mental health  
the same as any other  
Veteran**

# Resources

- HRT & Gender affirming pre surgical readiness evaluations w/ letter of recommendation as warranted—completed by Dr. Watters
- Gender affirming prosthetics via the LGBTQ+ prosthetics consult.
  - STPs, Gaffs, Wigs, Dilators, Breast forms, Binders, Packers – Dr. Watters typically enters these consults for providers given the multiple steps (websites, order details, etc.)
- Laser hair removal (case-by case basis), oriechtomy-removal of testicles (case-by-case basis [2 completed this year])
- LGBT secure messaging platform

# Resources


- At the present time, cryopreservation can be offered to Veterans prior to HRT. We store free of charge up to 5 years.
- The laws on changing legal name and gender marker vary state to state, however by using the resource [ID Documents Center | National Center for Transgender Equality](https://www.iddocumentscenter.org/) ([transequality.org](https://transequality.org)) you can assist Veterans interested in a legal name change in your state. Additional resources include the Privacy Officer at your facility who can guide you in responding to questions about legal name change and the medical record.

# To the future

---

- Starting in June 2021 VA initiated the rulemaking process to modify the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) to expand VA's care to transgender Veterans to **include gender-affirming surgery**. Removing this exclusion would allow VA to provide transgender and gender diverse Veterans with coordinated, medically necessary, transition-related surgical procedures. In addition, revising the medical benefits package would enable a safe, coordinated continuum of care that is Veteran-centric and consistent with VA's values of equity and respect for all Veterans. VA currently provides all medically necessary gender-affirming care to transgender Veterans except for gender-affirming surgical interventions, due to an exclusion in the VA medical benefits package.
- The rulemaking process can take approximately **two years** and includes a period of public comment. This will allow VA to develop the framework to provide the full continuum of care in a way that is consistent with VA's rigorous standards for quality health care.





Kristy Watters, PsyD  
LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Co-Coordinator  
LGBTQ+ SEP Manager

[Kristy.Watters@va.gov](mailto:Kristy.Watters@va.gov)

x6315

# Ms. Maureen Quzack

Field Office Supervisor

SC Department of Veterans' Affairs

843-818-5100 ext. 404358

SC DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS



LEAD \* SERVE \* REMEMBER

# Peer Support Services at RHJVAMC


LaJuana K. Bennett- Ruffin

Certified Peer Support Specialist



# What is Peer Support?

- In general terms, peer support is a form of help provided by those who share common experiences.
- At the VA, Peer Specialists (PS) are individuals recovering from a mental health or substance use challenges who provide targeted services to others with similar conditions.
- Peer support is not like clinical support, nor is it about being friends. Peer support staff are trained to give support and to help others on their recovery journey.
- Peer support is founded on the key principles of respect and understanding of another's situation through the shared experience of emotional and psychological pain



# What is a Certified Peer Specialist

- A Veteran with the lived experience of a mental health/substance use challenge that is in recovery helping others who have a psychiatric diagnosis identify and achieve specific life and recovery goals.
- CPS incorporate their recovery experience as a way of inspiring hope, learning and practicing new skills, and modeling effective coping techniques, and achieving their personal goals.
- CPS is actively engaged in his/her own personal recovery.
- Participates in training and passes certification test for peer support.



# RHJVAMC Peer Support Services

## MYRTLE BEACH

HUD-VASH  
STAR  
Outpatient MH

## CHARLESTON

STAR  
Inpatient MH  
VEC/PRRC  
HUD-VASH

## GOOSE CREEK

Outpatient MH

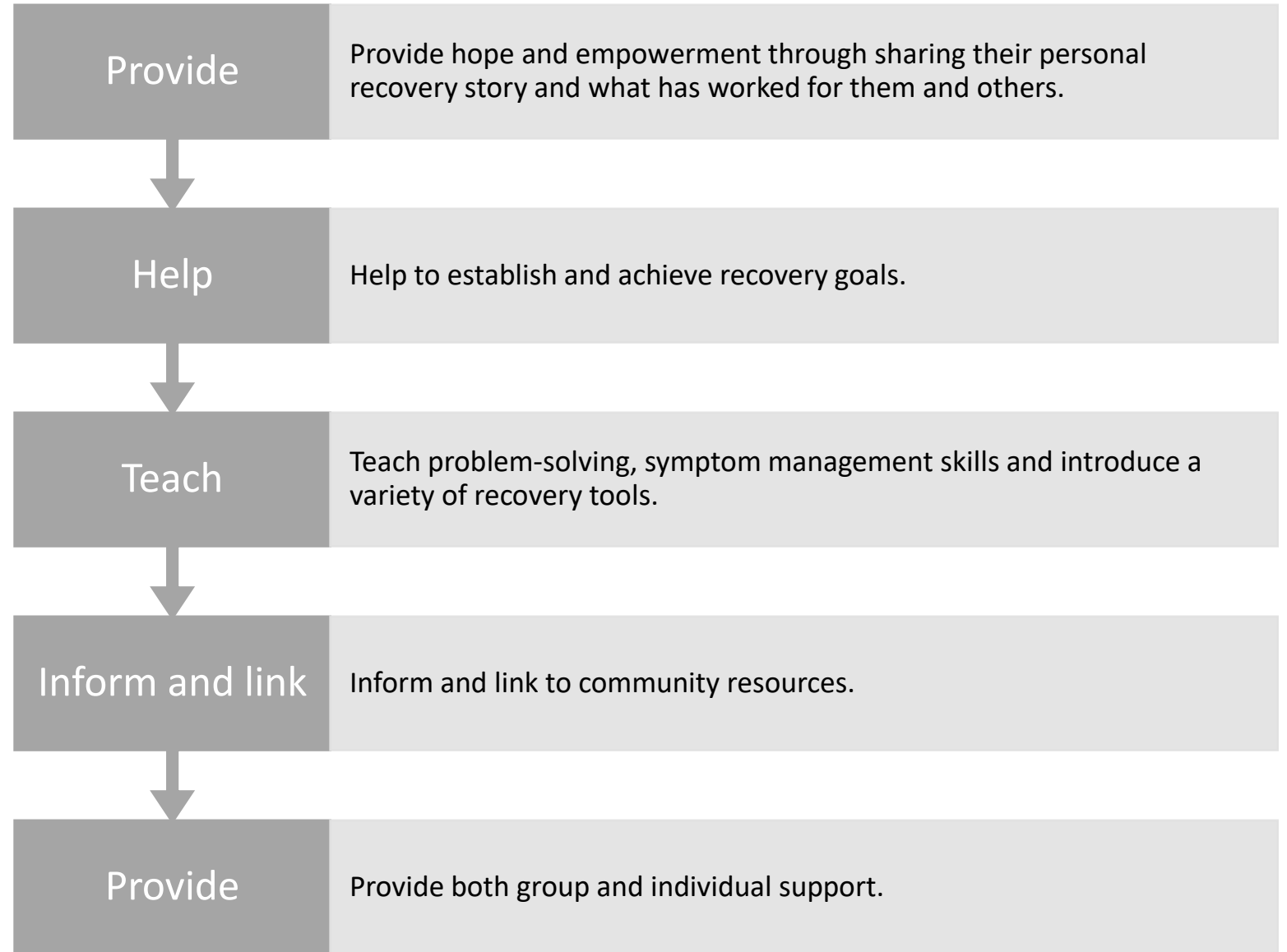
## SAVANNAH

HUD-VASH  
STAR  
Outpatient MH  
VEC/PRRC

## HINESVILLE

Outpatient MH  
VEC/PRRC

# How Can a Peer Specialist Help?



# How to Access Peer Services



# Questions?

Thank you for joining!

